DA WON'T CONFIRM JFK PLOT PROBE ON

Times Picayune 2/18/67

Doesn't Have to Explain Trips, He Retorts

District Attorney Jim Garrison reacted tersely and somewhat profanely Friday to questions about an investigation by his office concerning the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

All Garrison would say was that "it's very possible that such an investigation is being conducted."

But the usually suave district attorney bristled when questioned further, in particular about trips made by his investigators to several cities.

"I don't have to explain the trips to any newspaper," he said. "I will have members of my staff make trips anywhere, anytime, in connection with work I think is the duty of my office."

He then resorted to an unprintable phrase in telling a reporter what his editors and the newspapers could do about it.

CUT OFF SHORT

Garrison had told a reporter some weeks ago that his office was looking into the matter of Lee Harvey Oswald's activities while he had lived in New Orleans.

And earlier Friday, Garrison had told a second reporter it was possible that first Asst. Dist. Atty. Charles Ray Ward was handling such an investigation. It was when this reporter returned to question Garrison further that the district attorney cut him off in short fashion.

Several weeks ago Ward was quoted as saying an investigation was in progress, although he believed that little new information would be revealed.

The investigation received nationwide attention Friday when it was learned that the district attorney's office was spending thousands of dollars on the project.

The expenditures, totaling over $8,000, indicated more than a routine check was being made.

Garrison said Friday that "so much goes on in my office" there could be an investigation going on of which he might not be aware.

RESIDENTS QUIZZED

However, it was learned Friday that at least two New Orleans residents who knew Oswald, while he was living here in 1963 have been interrogated in recent weeks by representatives from the district attorney's office. They included Charles LeBlanc, who worked with Oswald in a coffee plant on Magazine st., and Adrian Alba, a garage operator who befriended Oswald.

LeBlanc, still employed at the Wiliam B. Reily & Co., Inc., coffee enterprise, 640 Magazine st., said he was quizzed for about five mnutes by a detective from Garrison's office. The interrogation took place about two weeks ago, he said, and consisted mainly of questions about Oswald's personality.

LeBlanc also was asked

Cont. in Sec. 1, Page 16, Col. 1

whether he saw Oswald in the company of others, to which LeBlanc replied no. LeBlanch said he knew Oswald and worked with him for three months in the summer of 1963 —the length of Oswald's employment as an "oiler" at the coffee plant.

Alba, who operates the Crescent City Garage at 618 Magazine, said he was approached for questioning in mid-January by a detective from the DA's office. Alba quoted the detective as saying the interrogation was "Jim Garrison's project" and proceeded to question for about 30 minutes.

FELT SORRY FOR HIM

The detective told Alba that he mainly was interested in determining whether Oswald had any associates or friends who may have lunched with him or picked him up after working hours. Alba said he never saw anyone in Oswald's company, and, in fact, had befriended Oswald himself because he felt sorry for him.

Oswald had worked next door to the garage at 4907 Magazine.

In addition to the local interrogations, trial assistants and investigators assigned to the DA have taken several unexplained trips to Dallas, Miami, Houston, Washington, San Francisco, and Angola—all reportedly in connection with the investigation.

A check of records of the City Finance Department and Criminal District Court showed more than $8,000 have been spent in the past three months for a "special investigation by the district attorney."

Besides the unexplained expenditures, several other happenings have occurred coincidentally in the past few days:

—Miguel Torres, a 26-year-old Cuban who formerly lived only a block from Oswald's last known New Orleans address, was returned Jan. 31 to the city from Angola State Penitentiary where he was serving a nine-year sentence for a burglary committed here in 1964. According to Orleans Criminal Sheriff Louis Heyd, the district attorney's office requested Torres be incarcerated at the parish prison to testify in an upcoming trial of Mises Wiggins charged with simple robbery on Dec. 8. 1966.

CUBAN WAS PAID

—A man arrested in New Orleans as a Texas fugitive in Nov. 26, 1963 (four days after Kennedy's assassination) was

JIM GARRISON
Launches probe.

kept under surveillance for the district attorney for a 24-hour period last month. He obstensibly was to appear before the Orleans Parish Grand Jury, but it is not known whether he did.

—A second Cuban man with a Miami address was paid money by the DA's office in January, reportedly for investigative expenses.

What allegedly sparked the local investigation is the possibility that a well-organized assassination plot involving New Orleans residents may have been hatched in 1963, prior to Oswald's departure for Dallas.

While in New Orleans, Oswald was a pro-Castro demonstrator and a member of the Fair Play for Cuba committee. During his stay here in the summer of 1963, he was involved in a scuffle with anti-Castro Cubans, who claimed he was trying to infiltrate their organization.

ROUTINE CHECK

The Warren Report, issued a year after Kennedy's death, said its investigation showed no existence of a plot and labeled Oswald as the lone participant in Kennedy's death. However, the local investigation began late last year, and is believed to have started with a routine check of information supplied to Garrison's office by a New Orleans private detective.

The detective allegedly gave the district attorney a list of names of people who should be questioned.

Carlos Bringuier, New Orleans delegate of the Cuban Student Directorate, who was involved in a scuffle with Oswald, said Friday he "would neither confirm nor deny" that he was contacted by the district attorney's office, but he hinted that he had by saying, "I'll be glad to speak to you after the district attorney speaks."

Asked if he had been pledged to secrecy, he said, "No, I can tell anything, but I still prefer to wait until the district attorney makes a statement."

PLOT BELIEVED

Asked if he was glad to see an investigation of the assassination, he said "I'm glad to see any investigation that would bring out the truth."

Bringuier said he still feels strongly that there was a Castro plot behind the assassination of President Kennedy.

He also revealed for the first time that 15 days before the death of Jack Ruby, who shot and killed Oswald, Bringuier sent Ruby a telegram addressed to the Parkland Hospital in Dallas, asking for the privilege of questioning Ruby. Bringuier said he put in the telegram that he would only have one or two questions for Ruby.

According to Bringuier, he never received an answer one way or the other.

Asked what questions he wanted to ask Ruby, Bringuier said the first would have been, "Why did you give the best gift of all to the Communists by shooting Oswald?" The second question, he said, would have dealt with a man Ruby saw at least twice in Cuba. Bringuier said the man's name was Solomon Pratkins, but he did not explain the apparent connection between the two men.

ALWAYS ALONE

Bringuier said he also wanted to see Ruby face to face because he felt he was able to look at people and tell if they were telling the truth. "What puzzles me so much about Ruby is that if he was all the superpatriot he claimed to be, why didn't he go to see President Kennedy drive by in Dallas. According to his testimony, he didn't even bother to watch the President on television," Bringuier stated.

Asked if he thought Oswald had any accomplices in New Orleans, Bringuier said he always saw Oswald alone. "If there was anyone in New Orleans who was involved in the plot with Oswald, he had better watch out, it looks like the district attorney means business," he remarked.

Oswald's landlady in New Orleans, Mrs. J. J. Garner, 4911 Magazine, said no one from the district attorney's office had contacted her concerning any recent investigation.

"Don't tell me they're going to start that again," she said.

MANY VISITORS

Mrs. Garner said she had had many visitors after the assassination and indicated she's had enough. Her husband remarked that "I'll always believe Oswald didn't do it alone." But he added that he definitely felt no one from New Orleans had been allied with Oswald in a plot.

Mrs. Garner said she could recall only three incidences of Oswald being visited by anyone. One time, she said, two Cuban-looking young men about 25 years of age came asking for Oswald, and had a pamphlet referring to The Fair Play for Cuba committee. She said a second time an elderly couple came to get Oswald, his wife and child and took them out for a weekend. A third visitor, she said, was Mrs. Ruth Payne, who befriended Marina Oswald in Dallas. She said Mrs. Payne came to get Marina and her child. Even then, she didn't see Mrs. Payne, only the car, she added.

EXPENSES LISTED

Reports that members of Garrison's staff have traveled to a number of places outside the continental United States in connection with the investigation could not be confirmed by expense record here. However, the following expenses for the "special investigation" were found as follows:

Nov. 25, 1966: $993, Louis Ivon, trip to San Francisco.

Dec. 2; $64.90 John Volz, expenses on trip to Miami.

Dec. 15; $500, John Volz, investigative expenses.

Dec. 28; $425.60, travel to Chicago.

Dec. 29; $605.99, travel to Cincinnati.

Jan. 4, 1967: $175.03 James Alcock, trip to Houston.

Jan. 4; $821, Detectives Kent Simms, Cliency Navarre and Charles Jonau, trip to Miami.

Jan. 5; $364.75, Thomas Duffy, trip to Miami.

Jan. 6; $427, Lester Otillio, trip to Miami.

Jan. 12; $133, John P. Volz, trip to Dallas.

Jan. 12; $131.05, Southern Research Company (private detectives), expenses.

Jan. 13; $114.90, trip to Laurel, Miss.

Jan. 18; $200, pay Frank Meloche for expenses of returning Detectives Doug Ward and Lester Otillio to New Orleans from Miami.

Jan. 18; $41.25, Airtaxi, Inc., Belle Chasse, for plane charter.

Jan. 19; $160, James Alcock for trip to Miami and New York.

Jan. 19; $203, Louis Ivon, trip to Dallas and Washington.

Jan. 19; $500, Louis Ivon, investigative expenses.

Jan. 20; $598, Bernardo Torres of Miami, investigative expense.

Jan. 20; $25, Louis Ivon, investigative expense.

Jan. 20; $9.14, Alvin Oser, trip to Slidell.

Jan. 23; $200, pay to Frank Meloche for additional expenses for Doug Ward and Lester Otillio in Miami.

Jan. 27; $17.80, Lynn Loisel and Charles Jonau, trip to Angola.

Jan. 27; $14.37, Fenner Seddgebeer, reimbursement for expenses over advance for Miami trip.

Jan. 28; $582, Fenner Sedgebeer, trip to Miami.

Jan. 28; $312, James Alcock and Louis Ivon, trip to Miami.

Jan. 31; $22.80, Clem Niedermier and Lynn Loisell, trip to Miami.

Feb. 2; $55.50, Andrew J. Schambra, investigative expense.

Feb. 2; 206.30, John Volz, trip to Dallas.

Feb. 8; $101.01, Russell W. Buckholt Jr., Florida Parole and Probation Commission, for travel to New Orleans.

Feb. 9; $100, Louis Ivon, investigative expense.

Feb. 13; $101.01, Russell W. Buckholt Jr., travel from Miami to New Orleans.

In addition to these expenses, court records show that former assistant DA Frank Klein was paid $345 for "special counsel" for a "special investigation" by the DA's office.

CHARLES RAY WARD
Confirms probe in progress.